

Fareed Zakaria



JIM HARRISON

At the Mic

An oratorical omnium gatherum

THE COMMENCEMENT afternoon speaker, journalist and author Fareed Zakaria, Ph.D. '93, LL.D. '12, gave an upbeat assessment of world affairs. But Phi Beta Kappa orator Derek Bok and Radcliffe Medalist Margaret H. Marshall detailed serious concerns about American democracy. Medical and dental graduates heard a searing call to service. And there were lighter moments, too. For reports on all the principal addresses (many with recordings and texts), visit harvardmagazine.com/commencement-2012.

"Profoundly" at Peace

Despite economic and other concerns ("The earth is getting hotter, we're running out of water, and a billion people are trapped in terrible poverty"), Fareed Zakaria was an evangelist of optimism. Thus,

The world we live in is, first of all, at peace—profoundly so. The richest countries of the world are not in major geopolitical, geomilitary competition with one another—no arms races, no proxy races, no wars, no cold wars among the richest countries of the world. You would have to go back hundreds of years to find an equivalent period of political stability.

That stability has enabled the emergence of a single global economy that has allowed "countries from all over the world to participate and flourish." In 1980, Zakaria observed, about 60 nations experienced robust economic growth of at least 4 percent a year, but by 2007 that number had doubled, and "even after the financial crisis, that number stands today at about 80." The growth of the global economy has meant that, according to the United Nations, poverty has been reduced more in the last 50 years than in the last 500 years, "and most of that

reduction has taken place in the last 20," said Zakaria. "The average Chinese person, for example, is 10 times richer than he or she was 50 years ago, with 25 years more of life expectancy." Worldwide life expectancy is rising to the extent that "We gain five hours of life expectancy every day," he reported—"without even exercising!"

Physics, Poetry, Pedagogy

Pope professor of the Latin language and literature Richard J. Tarrant, conferring a Phi Beta Kappa teaching award on lecturer on physics David Morin, quoted a student on the teacher's deftness in "enhancing physics with poetry," illustrating lectures with pedagogical limericks, such as: "Your units are wrong," cried the teacher. "Your church weighs six joules—what a feature! And the people inside/are four hours wide,/and eight gauss away from the preacher!"

"The Price of Democracy"

Harvard's president sits on the Sanders Theatre stage for the Phi Beta Kappa literary exercises, but is not called upon to play any role in them. President emeritus Derek Bok, returning this year as orator, called his appointment "a sort of reward" for having attended 21 prior exercises "without ever being allowed to utter a single word"—and threatened to emulate nineteenth-century predecessors who sometimes spoke for hours on end. He then turned to the serious matter of Americans' dissatisfaction with how their democracy functions. Rather than blaming politicians, he said, "I would respectfully suggest...that our anger is misdirected," because:

[I]n the United States, unlike virtually every other well-established democracy, poor people vote at only half the rate of their more prosperous fellow citizens. In a representative democracy, why should we expect politicians to pay much attention to those who do not vote?

We grumble about gridlock and the failure of Congress to agree on ways to solve our problems—yet a clear majority of Americans prior to the election of 2010 said that they



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Derek Bok

preferred politicians who stick to their positions without compromising.

We deplore the polarization in Congress between liberals and conserva-

tives. But a major cause of polarization is that so few people bother to vote in primary elections.

He wondered whether there might be a William Jamesian "moral equivalent of war" to "awaken us from our political lethargy," concluding, "I have no wholly satisfactory answer to give you. But of one thing, I do feel certain. Education is the place where we must begin."

"Meum est!"

Latin salutatorian Michael Kenneth Velchik '12 seemed perfect for what is an old-fashioned ritual: lanky, Lincolnesque beard, bow-tie equipped. He indulged in a 272-word final sentence (for the text and a translation, see <http://harvardmag.com/latin-12>.) As the degree candidates followed along with their in-program cheat sheets, and roared ever more lustily when he invoked their schools ("alii ut rem



Michael Kenneth Velchik

quaerant, alii ut rei publicae serviant, alii ut reis adsint, alii ut aegros medicent, alii ut aedificia extollant, alii deos, alii ut dentes instruant, alii ignaros..." ["some of us to work in business, others to become involved in...government, some to be lawyers, others doctors, some to raise up buildings, others praises to God, some to straighten out teeth, others petulant students..."]), Velchik proved adept at improvisational Latin, too. "Tacete, tacete—meum est!" he told the M.B.A. candidates ("Be quiet, be quiet—this is my show!"). And to others, "Satis est!" ("That's enough!").

"Miseries That You Did Not Cause"

Donald M. Berwick '68, M.D.-M.P.P. '72—past president and CEO of the Institute for Healthcare Improvement, former administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services—has run huge and influential institutions. Now a lecturer in Harvard Medical School's department of health care policy, he chose as the subject for the medical and dental schools' Class Day speech his relationship with one patient, whom he called "Isaiah."

Isaiah appeared in 1984, from inner-city Boston, age 15, in pain; Berwick treated him for leukemia, successfully. But he could not alter the other facts of Isaiah's life: smoking dope from the age of 5; having

a gun before age 10, and committing his first armed robbery by age 12; turning to crack two years later; cycling in and out of jobs, because of his own carelessness; seeing two brothers jailed and another murdered. As Berwick said, "He once told me that he thought his leukemia was a blessing, because at least while he was in the hospital, he couldn't be on the streets." But it was on the streets that he died, 20 years after his leukemia was cured, when "they found him on a...corner, breathing but brain-dead

from a prolonged convulsion from uncontrolled diabetes and even more uncontrolled despair." From this loss, Berwick drew lessons for the newly minted physicians:

I bring Isaiah today as my witness to two duties; you have both....

First, you will cure his leukemia. You will bring the benefits of biomedical

science to him. Isaiah's poverty, his race, his troubled life-line—not one of these facts or any other fact should stand in the way of...his human right to care....Health care is a human right; it must be made so in our Nation; and it is your duty to make it so. Therefore, for your patients, you will go to the mat, and you will not lose your way. You are a physician....You will put the patient first.

But, that is not enough. Isaiah's life and death testify to a further duty, one more subtle—but no less important. Maybe this second is not a duty that you meant to embrace; you may not welcome it. It is to cure, not only the killer leukemia; it is to cure the killer injustice.

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry wrote, "To become a man is to be responsible; to be ashamed of miseries that you did not cause." I say this: "To profess to be a healer, that is, to take the oath you take today, is to be responsible; to be ashamed of miseries that you did not cause."

"Where Judges Write for Popularity and Not for Justice"

Radcliffe Medalist Margaret H. Marshall, Ed.M. '69, Ed '77, L '78—a past Harvard vice president and general counsel, and retired Chief Justice of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court—wished to share "some concerns that I have about these United States." To do so,

I turn first to my own beginnings,

in Newcastle, a small village in the foothills of the Drakensberg Mountains, that great mountain spine that runs north/south through one of God's special gardens—South Africa.

I was born and spent my childhood in what Nobel Prize winner Nadine Gordimer has called the "rigidly racist and inhibited colonial society" of small-town, provincial South Africa. Apartheid was the law of the land, and while my childhood years were secure and comfortable, life was very different for the majority of South Africans, black South Africans, those who waited on and worked for us, whose ghettos ("townships") lay beyond the confines of my comfortable home.

Education in the United States, at Yale Law School, opened her eyes, Marshall said, "to the ideal of equal justice under law. Here I saw the rule of law, the 'rule of democratic law,' in action. It opened school doors for black children. It dislodged a President for abuse of power. It gave women control over our bodies. What I learned at Yale gave voice, gave structure, to the ideals I had yearned for in South Africa: a just society, a society founded on the rule of law," importantly including "fair and impartial courts." Now, in the wake of partisan political attacks, recent Supreme Court rulings, and the flood of money into judicial campaigns, she as-

serted that the rule of democratic law, impartially administered, is in grave danger. She concluded by citing a retired Supreme Court justice (and prior Radcliffe Medalist):

Justice Sandra Day O'Connor voiced concern about "the efforts of those who would strong-arm the judiciary into adopting their preferred policies. It takes a lot of degeneration before a country falls into dictatorship," she said, "but we should avoid these ends by avoiding these beginnings." Justice O'Connor is not known for hyperbole.

I return to my beginnings. I grew up in a country where the government controlled the courts, where judges were powerless to declare a law passed by the apartheid parliament to be inhumane, oppressive, or discriminatory. Do we here in this great country really want a legal system where judges write for popularity and not for justice? The warning signs are there for all to see. The question is: have we the will to protect the structure of government that for so long has protected us?



Donald M. Berwick



Margaret H. Marshall

Commencement Highlights

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Frank and Samberg Headline Class Day 2012

The congressman and the comedian (left) entertain and advise graduating seniors. With video. harvardmag.com/classday-12

Bruce Mau Addresses Design Students

"Together we will change the world," the designer tells Graduate School of Design degree candidates. harvardmag.com/mau-12



Sheryl Sandberg on "Honesty and Jungle Gyms"

Facebook's COO promotes gender equality and advocates open workplace communication to Harvard Business School graduates on Class Day. harvardmag.com/sandberg-12

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